

Moscow Sends Armored Vehicles Through Tense Lithuania Capital

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MOSCOW, April 1 — The Kremlin sent a column of armored personnel carriers through the Lithuanian capital today, strengthening both the Soviet military presence and the psychological pressure on Lithuania to retreat from its claim of independence.

The latest move in the war of nerves over the republic's sovereignty occurred in midafternoon, a day after President Mikhail S. Gorbachev appealed to Lithuania to "annul" its declaration of independence as the price for negotiation or invite "grave consequences" on both sides.

Other Issues Are Open

Officials in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, reiterated today that while a retreat from independence was out of the question, all other issues were open for negotiation.

The two sides remained far from a common path toward talks, with the situation remaining tense but somewhat fluid.

Officials of the Lithuanian government avoided hard-edged oratory today and again admitted to the theoretical possibility of a referendum on independence, a referendum that Mr. Gorbachev has insisted is a minimum condition of his negotiating on the issue.

At the same time, a commentary on Vremya, the Soviet Government's main television news program, suggested tonight that the time had come for talks and that they did not have to be arranged on a presidential level but rather might begin at the level of legislative deputies.

Such nuances of possible moderation, however, tended to be lost in the sound once again of Soviet armor moving through the tense republic.

Witnesses in Vilnius said that more than two dozen tank-treaded armored personnel carriers proceeded noisily through the city from the railroad

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depot to the main Soviet military base on the northern edge of the capital. Earlier, about 3:30 A.M., other armored troop movements awoke residents of some city neighborhoods as leaders of the heavy Soviet military presence made further adjustments in deployment, officials of the Lithuanian government said. They could offer no detailed description of the vehicles or their mission.

Before Lithuania's Parliament declared independence on March 11, an estimated 30,000 Soviet troops were normally stationed in the republic. But the contingent has been reinforced with an undetermined number of troops from neighboring republics as the crisis has continued, even though officials in Moscow insist they do not intend to use force as long as Soviet lives are not threatened.

Significantly, perhaps, the Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, made no comment on the latest troop movements. Other officials also appeared to be focusing on whatever promise of negotiation might evolve from Mr. Gorbachev's Saturday statement rather than on denouncing the latest Soviet pressure in the streets.

"This army has been imposed on us, and no one knows how large it is or what its movements will be," Deputy Prime Minister Kazimier Motieka said. "This situation must be changed through the process of negotiations."

While the troop movements once again served to highlight the standoff, various political factors were more quietly a part of the sovereignty crisis.

Chief among these was the fact that Soviet officials are to travel to Washington this week to prepare for the coming summit meeting of Presidents Bush and Gorbachev. Any stepping up of Soviet military action in Lithuania



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Armored personnel carriers rolled down the streets of Vilnius.

would seem likely to threaten the summit meeting.

An additional political factor is the resumption on Monday of the Parliament session in Tallinn at which Estonia has been charting its own, more cautious approach to independence, a slower pace that legislators deny is related to Mr. Gorbachev's pressure on Lithuania.

Estonia Parliament to Meet

The Estonian Parliament is to take up a resolution of support for Lithuania and condemnation of the Gorbachev Government. Any hedging in its language would be closely studied for its effects on the Lithuanian crisis and on Mr. Gorbachev's attempts to contain it and prevent its becoming a precedent for other separatist republic movements in his troubled nation.

President Landsbergis already has found his appeals for official recognition ignored by the major democracies, which have, however, been admonitory over the Soviet troop forays occurring almost daily in Vilnius.

Many potential flash points remain to be weathered if the crisis is ever to reach some stage of conciliation. One of them looms in the form of the spring draft of young Lithuanian men into the Soviet Army, a drawn-out process that begins this month.

Lithuanian officials suffered a setback earlier when young Lithuanian men heeded the separatist movement's call to republic patriotism and deserted the Soviet "army of occupation." The army has since been arresting many of them, with the Lithuanian government unable to make good on promises to protect them.

The Soviet authorities continued to try to restrict information about the republic, with Western journalists removed and individual foreign volunteers beginning to receive notice that they must leave. William J. H. Hough 3d, a lawyer from New York City who had been advising the Landsbergis government, said he had been informed by the Soviet authorities that he must leave by Monday because of his activities.

Troops Avoid Key Bastions

Soviet troop initiatives have been the main factor in rising tensions in the republic, with a half dozen buildings in Vilnius seized in the last week in unresisted nocturnal paratroop forays, which have thus far avoided the key independence bastions of the Parliament and the television center.

Troops moved into the republic prosecutor's building on Friday, and the situation there remained confused, said Aidas Palubinskas, a spokesman for the republic. He said the soldiers had been unexpectedly admitting justice officials of the pro-independence government, and a more accurate picture should emerge this week of whether the Gorbachev Government will try to take over the courts.

Likewise, the effect of the troops' seizure of the main printing plant should



Reuters

A column of Soviet armored personnel carriers rumbling through the Lithuanian capital yesterday.



Reuters

As a new Soviet armored column arrived yesterday in Vilnius, residents of the Lithuanian capital passed a wall scrawled with graffiti opposed to the continuing Soviet military presence.

be made clearer on Monday, with officials wondering whether the main pro-independence newspapers will be interfered with. Normally they do not publish on the weekend.

In commenting on the referendum issue, Mr. Motieka said the republic's strong support of independence had been made clear enough in the recent elections, in which the separatist candidates of the Sajudis national front scored the heaviest in favoring immediate independence. The position of the breakaway Communist Party, which placed second, was that a slower pace should be taken toward independ-

ence with the republic's economy treated as a critical factor.

Mr. Motieka noted that current law allows for referendums, providing that 300,000 voters request one. The Sajudis movement had such a petition under way earlier and collected 400,000 signatures, he said, before the elections forced the pace of independence.

Mr. Gorbachev has made this a special point of complaint in dismissing the republic's declaration of independence three weeks ago as illicit. He says the troop movements are part of the national Government's duty to preserve law in what remains a Soviet re-

public. Self-determination, he says, is an issue to be settled by mutual agreement under pending constitutional provisions.

As they are being shaped by Gorbachev officials, however, these provisions threaten to add years of political hurdles to Lithuania's course.

Lithuanian officials insist that their sovereignty is unchallengeable by Soviet authority because it amounts to a restoration of the independence lost 50 years when the Baltic republics were forcibly annexed by Moscow as part of a secret pact between Hitler and Stalin.